

WATER *IN THE* **DESERT** **2026**

A CONFERENCE ABOUT
Water in the Chihuahuan Desert of West Texas

PROGRAM AGENDA

FEBRUARY 11-13, 2026

SUL ROSS STATE UNIVERSITY, ALPINE, TEXAS

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2026

Spotlight sessions—An orientation and briefing of timely West Texas water issues

Espino second floor, Morgan University Center, Sul Ross State University

Attendees should plan accordingly, as no meal will be served before the program.

12pm | Registration, networking and exhibits

Master of Ceremonies: **ADELINE FOX**, Director of Communications, Texas Water Foundation

1:00pm | Welcome and Setting the Stage; A look at West Texas land trends and drought and climate trends in our arid Chihuahuan Desert region

DR. LOUIS HARVESON, Associate Provost of Research and Development and the Dan Allen Hughes, Jr., Endowed Director of the Borderlands Research Institute, Sul Ross State University

DR. ROEL LOPEZ, Director, Natural Resources Institute, Texas A&M University

DR. JOHN NEILSEN-GAMMON, Texas State Climatologist; Director, Southern Regional Climate Center, Texas A&M University

1:30pm | Stewardship for Healthy Watersheds; Tried and true strategies for improving rangelands, slowing down water, and enhancing ecosystems and wildlife habitats

BILLY TARRANT, Interim Director, Meadows Research Institute for West Texas Water, Sul Ross State University

PRICE RUMBELOW, Conservation Delivery Coordinator, Rio Grande Joint Venture, American Bird Conservancy



**SPEAKER BIOS
AVAILABLE
ON EVENT
WEBSITE.**

2:00pm | An Essential Primer on GCDs, DFCs and GMAs; Groundwater Conservation Districts, Desired Future Conditions, Groundwater Management Areas, and Joint Water Planning in Texas

NATALIE BALLEW, P.G., Groundwater Division Director, Texas Water Development Board

ADAM FOSTER, Executive Director, Texas Alliance of Groundwater Districts

2:30pm | Rio Grande and Pecos River Compacts, Flows and Challenges; A conversation about agreements and conditions from the early 1900s that formed today's Rio Grande and Pecos River compacts, special water control districts and the 1944 Rio Grande Treaty

SARAH SCHLESSINGER, CEO, Texas Water Foundation

BOBBY JANECKA, Former Commissioner for Texas Commission on Environmental Quality

LOURCEY SAMS, President, Pecos River Resolution Corp

3:00pm | Networking Break with student research poster sessions and exhibits

3:30pm | Water for Texas' Future; Opportunities provided for West Texas communities with the passage of Proposition 4, dedicating \$20 billion to water infrastructure projects

ROGELIO RODRIGUEZ, Director, Water Finance Exchange

JENNIFER WALKER, Senior Director, Texas Coast and Water Program, National Wildlife Federation

4:00pm | Produced Water, The Biggest Conversation in the Permian Basin; Research, permitting, pilot testing, beneficial reuse strategies and priorities

AMY HARDBERGER, J.D., P.G. Director, Center for Water Law and Policy, Texas Produced Water Consortium Advisory Council, Texas Tech University

DR. SCOTT COLLINS, Associate Professor Natural Resources Management, Texas Produced Water Consortium Advisory Council, Texas Tech University

4:30pm | Data Centers; What they may mean for water in West Texas

ADAM CONNER, PMP, ENV SP, Central Texas Water Supply Lead, Freese and Nichols, Inc.

DR. MARCUS GARY, P.G. Research Associate Professor, Bureau of Economic Geology; Jackson School of Geosciences; The University of Texas at Austin

5:00pm | Welcome Reception hosted by Environmental Defense Fund, Rio Grande Joint Venture and Texas Wildlife Association. Enjoy happy hour appetizers and refreshments while visiting exhibits and student research poster sessions.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2026

The Big Picture for Water in West Texas

8:00am | Networking breakfast, registration and exhibits

Please join us for breakfast and exhibits on the second floor of the Morgan University Center. Then make your way to the Morelock Academic Building and Marshall Auditorium for our morning sessions. Thank you.

9:00am | Welcome and Opening Remarks

DR. LOUIS HARVESON, Associate Provost of Research and Development and the Dan Allen Hughes, Jr., Endowed Director of the Borderlands Research Institute, Sul Ross State University

PAUL L. FOSTER, Owner, KC Ranch and Glass Mountain Ranch; Chairman, Franklin Mountain Investments and Chairman, Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission

9:15am | Keynote Session

Water Scarcity—Realities and Solutions; Seeking water sustainability in a drying climate

BRIAN RICHTER, Author and President of Sustainable Waters

9:45am | Grounded in Science; A timely exploration of groundwater research, data modeling, and how it is applied to help local communities plan and make decisions

Introduction: **ASHLEY MORGAN**, Director, Texas Water Development Board

Moderator: **JOHN DUPNIK**, Deputy Executive Administrator, Office of Water Science and Conservation, Texas Water Development Board

DR. KEVIN URBANCZYK, Senior Research Scientist, Meadows Research Institute for West Texas Water, Sul Ross State University

AMY BUSH, Hydrologist, P.G., GMA 4 and Jeff Davis County GCD consultant

TREY GERFERS, General Manager, Presidio County Underground Water Conservation District

10:45am | Break

11:00am | Legislative Action; Members of the Texas Legislature discuss statewide water policy opportunities

Moderator: **VANESSA PUIG-WILLIAMS**, Senior Director, Texas Water Program, Environmental Defense Fund

Panelists: **STATE REPRESENTATIVE BROOKS**

LANDGRAF (Dist. 81), Chairman, House Environmental Regulations Committee

STATE REPRESENTATIVE EDDIE MORALES

(Dist. 74)

STATE REPRESENTATIVE STAN KITZMAN

(Dist. 85)

12pm | Lunch and Networking Break with student research poster sessions and exhibits

Please make your way to the second floor of the Morgan University Center for lunch and networking. After lunch, return to the Morelock Academic Building and Marshall Auditorium for our afternoon sessions. Thank you.

1:30pm | Reflections of Water; **TRACY O. KING**, Senior Advisor to Texas Speaker of the House Dustin Burrows and former member of the Texas House of Representatives, former Chair of House Natural Resources Committee

1:45pm | County Voices; Local County Judges discuss challenges, obstacles, and solutions related to water for their communities.

Moderator: Brewster County Judge **GREG HENINGTON**

Panelists: Pecos County Judge **JOE SHUSTER**

Hudspeth County Judge **JOANNA MACKENZIE**

Real County Judge **BELLA RUBIO**

2:30pm | A Conversation about the Rule of Capture; The struggle to protect groundwater as groundwater conservation districts navigate managing a privately owned, yet shared resource. Bring your questions! We have plenty of time for Q&A.

DR. ROBERT MACE, Executive Director, The Meadows Center for Water and the Environment

ROBERT POTTS, Former General Manager, Edwards Aquifer Authority

3:15pm | Break

3:30pm | Research Lightning Rounds; An overview of **Meadows Research Institute for West Texas Water** focus areas, advancing science and solutions for west Texas Water challenges. In this session, Meadows Research Institute scientists and collaborators at Sul Ross briefly describe the current, ongoing, and nascent research in groundwater, surface water, and spring flow, as well as in some of the plant and animal life using these water resources.

Moderator: **BILLY TARRANT**, Interim Director, Meadows Research Institute for West Texas Water

Special Remarks: **ERIC R. MEADOWS**, President & CEO, The Meadows Foundation



DR. KEVIN URBANCZYK, Senior Research Scientist, Meadows Research Institute for West Texas Water, Sul Ross State University: Groundwater-surface water interactions in the Lower Canyons of the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River

DR. JESSE KELSCH, Research Scientist, Meadows Research Institute for West Texas Water, Sul Ross State University: Analysis of regional and local rock-fabric influences on groundwater flow toward the Lower Canyons and toward San Solomon Springs

DR. KELBI DELAUNE, Research Scientist, Meadows Research Institute for West Texas Water, Sul Ross State University: Investigating aquatic communities and ecosystem change in the Trans-Pecos region

DR. CHRIS RITZI, Professor of Biology, Sul Ross State University: An update of three salt cedar biocontrol opportunities along the Rio Grande and Pecos Rivers

4:00pm | Our West Texas Elders; A sharing of wisdom, and stories from the past that help guide our land and water future

Moderator: **DR. ANDREW SANSOM**, Founder, Meadows Center for Water and the Environment, Texas State University; Former Executive Director, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Panelists: **TERRY BISHOP** - Presidio Valley Farms, Presidio County

JANET ADAMS - Jeff Davis County

BILL SIBLEY - Sibley Last Chance Ranch, Culberson County

DA HARRAL - Harral Livestock Company, Pecos County

4:45pm | Closing Remarks:

Congressman **TONY GONZALES**, U.S. House of Representatives (Dist. 23)

5:00pm | Closing reception at the Museum of the Big Bend Hosted by the Meadows Research Institute for West Texas Water

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2026

Morning Field Trips: Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute; Balmorhea State Park and San Solomon Springs; Dixon Water Foundation Mimms Unit with Rio Grande Joint Venture; Diamond Y Preserve with The Nature Conservancy and the Patty Manning Pollinator Garden in Alpine.

RSVP directly with your field trip host by scanning this code.



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Be sure to visit *THE PATH OF WATER*, by Colleen O'Brien, on display at the Museum of the Big Bend—a series of paintings made in watersheds and tributaries of the Rio Grande.